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An Essay on The Drama



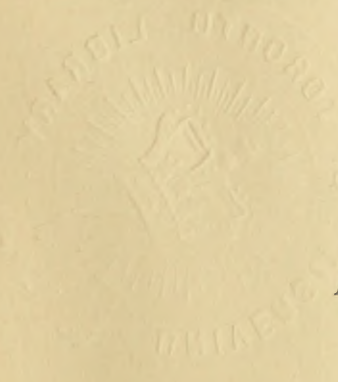
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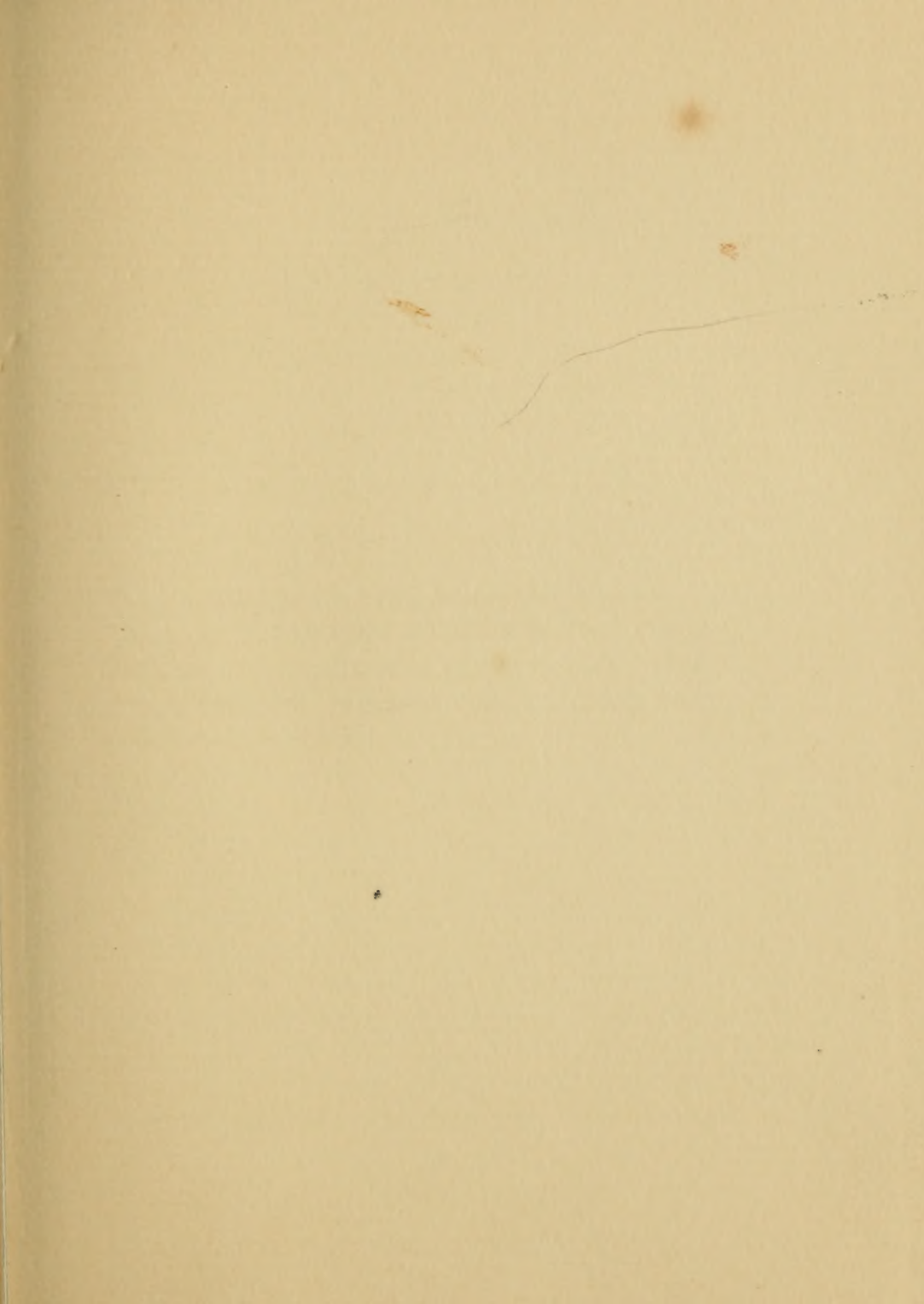
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THE GREAT THEME OF DRAMA.
MAN.

“Created half to rise and half to fall,
Great Lord of all things, yet a prey to all,
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.”

—Alexander Pope.

THE DRAMA.

CRITICISM IS NOT ANALYSIS.

SINCE Aristotle wrote his famous treatise upon dramatic art innumerable works have been published covering every possible phase of its development, and such a necessary part of our lives has the drama become that today the daily press and other periodicals devote a very considerable part of their space to it and its criticism. This has encouraged a number of brilliant authors to essay this field of literature, with the result that certain of them have developed into able playwrights. However, competent critics are quite as rare as great dramatists, and much of the criticism published gives little more than the writer's personal opinion, without a reason, direct or indirect, for his conclusions. Thus much misstatement and false argument pass unchallenged, in which the average reader is partly to blame, for at best he has only vague ideas upon these subjects, and rarely the courage to defend his opinion upon them. Nevertheless, intelligent criticism is quite within the range of the average mind, and literary style is not necessary to establish a truth. If certain modern critics lack

full knowledge of their theme, they want neither egotism nor pertinacity, and, to do them justice, they are frequently sincere. A favorite method is to make an assertion, and then by a system of iteration and reiteration convince themselves and their readers that their assertion is true. There is a certain power in reiteration, as we know from experience, for in the realms of science and theology gross errors have thus been imposed upon us, and unfortunately the realm of art is no exception, for illogical reasoning is not restricted to any particular class, if common sense is reserved for the few.

Amid the mass of erroneous tradition which has become our heritage is the false assertion that the analytical mind is not creative. Unfortunately this idea is partly supported by the fact that critics, as a rule, produce little but criticism, and rarely practice the arts they criticise. But if this is true, how about the craftsmen who toil daily at their art? Are they analysts or not? Do they produce their results at haphazard, or do they work sanely and intelligently to a given end? The answer to these questions can be most positive. The greatest craftsmen have all been men of strong analytical minds, for the quality of mind which can analyze and properly relate the parts of a whole can with equal success reassemble them. If it cannot, it is because the analysis is incorrect, or because the force which should unite the whole is unknown. To quote isolated examples, therefore, to prove the contrary is

futile, for the greatest scientists, sculptors, poets, painters and musicians can be cited to establish our opinion. The truth is that the same type of mind is required for analysis as for synthesis, and the man who works as chance directs has little prospect of successfully competing with the one who has mastered his subject. Criticism may or may not be useful; that depends upon the knowledge, experience and point of view of the critic. Analysis is always helpful, for it depends upon the sum of experience of many minds, its deductions being drawn from facts properly related. It is therefore impersonal and open to the additions or eliminations which time and experience may establish.



THE ÆSTHETIC ESSENTIAL IN DRAMA.

RUSKIN'S definition of art is, nature passed through the alembic of man. The fundamental source of art is therefore nature, not man. Man expresses nature in his own terms, and in doing this he blends with it his own individuality. One of the important functions of art is to convey the thoughts and emotions of the author to another. We must possess a beautiful thought before we can express it. If our thought is worthy, our expression well chosen, and our audience attuned, the result will be successful. This holds good regardless of the form of expression chosen, be it painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music or drama. It will be noted, however, that this demands three things: first, a good thought; second, a perfect expression, and, third, a responsive audience. Modern criticism, with but few exceptions, relates to the first two, and so engrossed is it with technique and other details that the audience in whom the art must ultimately find its response is entirely forgotten. Moreover, any attempt to analyze their emotions is generally considered futile, for the reason that an audience is a group and not an individual, the idea being that there can be just as many dif-

ferent impressions as there are individuals. We believe this theory to be false, for if the primal intent of art is to convey the emotions of the author, the second vital requisite is unity, and this demands that the impression conveyed be unified; that is to say, the audience, collectively, must feel the emotion intended by the author. This cannot be the case if each individual receive a different impression, and here is precisely where so many works fail. The elements of unity, harmony, symmetry, variety, proportion, balance, contrast, etc., are common to all arts, but in the drama their combination becomes extremely intricate. However, if the drama is the most difficult, it certainly comes the nearest to the perfect form of expression, for it combines poetry, painting and music with action in such a manner as to produce the illusion of reality. In no other art is this possible. What wonder, then, that it should have such a hold upon us, and that we should seek to solve its mysteries.

If this be the case can we not study the effects of certain dramas upon given audiences, and thereby discover the secret of success? We believe this to be possible.

In a vast country such as this, where the character, life and tastes of the people vary so greatly, it is hopeless to develop any one form of drama which will be acceptable to all. Consequently we have melodrama for the masses; farce and musical comedy for the intellectually jaded and weary; the

society drama and comedy for those whose social aspirations have been unfulfilled; the opera for those who love and understand music and wish to be held for a while by its mystic spell, and finally the intellectual drama for the elect. This classification has been accepted by managers and playwrights as a wise one, and as the key to financial success. Monetary success is indeed no gauge of artistic merit, but unfortunately art must receive practical encouragement or it will die. We therefore assume that a composite form of drama, one which will please all tastes and classes, is an impossibility, and vaudeville, which is a general hodgepodge, is unworthy of our serious consideration, in spite of the fact that it is very remunerative.



"THE PLAY OF THE PEOPLE."

BUT, we may ask, from whom do the theatres receive their greatest support? It is certainly not from patrons of the intellectual drama, nor from the lovers of opera, but we believe from the masses—the people who toil all day and seek some relief from the deadly monotony of their lives. And again we ask, what do the managers offer these people? Melodrama of the most sensational sort. If we demand the reason, we are told that this is what they want. We believe this statement to be without foundation, and that these people who are the real supporters of the theatre are perfectly capable of appreciating something better and more artistic than that which they are receiving. Human nature does not vary greatly, and themes which appeal to the human heart will find a response in high and low alike. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." The trouble is not with the masses, but with the managers and the playwrights, both of whom fail to recognize the intrinsic worth of their audiences. We firmly believe that the masses are much more appreciative than our managers will admit, and that artistic work rendered in terms which they can understand will be accepted quite as readily as

the typical melodrama. In proof of this many examples could be cited, but two must suffice—"Shore Acres," written by the late James A. Hearne, which is recognized by good critics as the best American drama ever written, and "Little Lord Fauntleroy," by Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, which, if we remember correctly, held the stage for four consecutive seasons. This charming drama was accepted by all classes of society, from north to south and east to west, yet it was a story of the greatest simplicity, without the slightest attempt at the theatrical situation or effect. Surely, if this marvelous result can be achieved by one who has heretofore considered the narrative her forte, why cannot our playwrights essay similar themes? The answer to this is, that they are hidebound by tradition, and with few exceptions underestimate the real worth of the people to whom they appeal. If they really believed that their audiences were capable of appreciating better works, they would write them, for certain of these authors are men of ability; but unfortunately they do not; consequently the masses must be content with what they get or shun the theatre. It is said that we are a long suffering public, but the indications are near at hand that if the present policy of our managers is continued the theatre will receive a rebuff from which it will take years to recover.

We have stated that the real supporters of the theatre are the masses, that human nature does not

vary greatly, and that an analysis of the effect of certain dramas upon these audiences would seem to be possible. This we believe to be the case, for orators who have had occasion to address varied gatherings throughout this country have recognized that certain themes always meet with approval, especially those in which the element of humor is properly mingled with the heroic or the pathetic. The emotions of love, sympathy, pity, fear, hate, jealousy, etc., are common to all people, of course in varying degree; the same is true of those qualities which constitute character, such as self-reliance, courage, honor, etc.; therefore we should hope to find a theme which would play upon these chords, and by tempering it with a little humor produce a result which would find an immediate response. Curiously enough, this is precisely what the authors of melodrama think they accomplish in their plays. Unfortunately, they confuse the theatrical with the dramatic, and harp upon situation to the neglect of cause and effect. The result is a forced effort to secure a thrilling episode or scene, with the hope of stirring their audience, thereby appealing mainly to the emotions of fear or terror instead of the loftier emotions. The result is neither artistic nor dramatic.

But, first, what are the emotions to which we must appeal? Briefly, they may be divided into two classes: those which produce satisfaction, pleasure or an elevation of the soul, and those

which produce displeasure, depression or pain, the law of compensation demanding that the pleasurable emotions be counterbalanced by the unpleasant ones. This produces contrast and prevents that monotony which would be unendurable. Life is light and shadow; to live there must be conflict, for life from its inception is based upon this principle. Man has been defined as a combination of the animal, the intellectual and the spiritual, and no doubt all normal men have these attributes in varying degrees, but in the last analysis it is the spiritual quality which gives real worth; therefore it is reasonable to assume that only such works as in their final effect appeal to the best emotions are really worthy. However, contrast being one of the elements of art, as it is of nature itself, its use is important in drama. Therefore in well constructed dramas we find the pleasurable emotions counterbalanced by the painful ones, with the result that there is produced an enduring impression, just as in a picture the high lights are the result of contrast with the shadows. It is an old and true saying that art is greater than the greatest artist, and the drama is no exception. Plays have been written which deal with sorrow, pain and suffering from the opening to the closing scene, and it would seem that these form an exception, but it is safe to assert that no drama portraying only sorrow or suffering could endure which does not awaken in the audience profound pity or sympathy, and in doing this it indi-


rectly appeals to the best emotions of human nature. This is the purpose of all good tragedies. Whether or no it is wise to portray this sombre side of life is another question. From our point of view we believe it is a mistake to do so at the expense of the brighter and more hopeful, because there is a hidden belief in man that all nature is designed for good, and it is this which upholds him in his conflict with evil. Therefore the play of the people should be hopeful and not pessimistic, which is the grave defect of some of the modern dramas of the German School. As most diseases run their course, so the present pest of melodrama must run its day. Then perhaps the frenzied theatrical managers will listen to reason and give the masses, their real supporters, better plays and better art. This will encourage our best authors to enter this superb field of literature and take the place of those playwrights who are incapable of appreciating the worth of the people to whom they appeal.

What form the popular drama of the future will take in this country is at present difficult to determine, but this we predict: It will deal with themes which can be understood by the people, themes which touch their hearts and lives. It will be true to life, and its light and shadow will be so blended that the hopeful and optimistic will dominate, for as a nation we are yet in our youth, and youth is always hopeful. While it is true that our appreciation of art is correspondingly immature,

there is this compensation, we have unbounded faith in our people and our country, and the day may not be as far distant as we imagine when there will arise here, as in Germany, a school of young and daring playwrights, who will deliver their messages in powerful dramas appealing to the masses, and sound a clarion note that shall awaken the nation.



SYMPATHY AS A DRAMATIC FORCE.

HE recent production in this country of two new dramas, one "Letty," by Arthur W. Pinero, and the other "Business Is Business," by Octave Mirbeau, has afforded students and lovers of the drama an excellent opportunity to compare the work of these masters and study the deeper problems of playwriting. The comparison is of particular interest for the reason that it confirms the great value of sympathy as a dramatic force, already suggested in the preceding paragraph, "The Play of the People." That a drama may succeed in which the element of humor or comedy dominates is well known, and in the hands of a master the element of terror may also produce marvelous effects upon an audience. But unquestionably it is sympathy which produces the emotion within us which gives us the greatest pleasure; for that of humor is ephemeral, and that produced by terror or fear is unquestionably disagreeable to us. Therefore if we are to select a subject for drama, one which will hold our audience from first to last, one which will win and exalt the highest emotions, we must appeal to their sympathy. Indeed, we will even go so far as to assert that no drama can be truly great which does

not produce this emotion, and that a drama is relatively great as the sympathetic note dominates. This may appear a bold statement, but, when we consider that sympathy is the strongest force in life, it should not surprise us, for sympathy alone can touch the human heart, and the human heart is the well-spring of life itself.

Stated broadly, drama is that form of expression which gives life and actual being to the thoughts of the author, as conveyed through the characters by their actual existence for the time being upon the stage. Now it is generally admitted that the dramatic form of expression is the narrowest and most difficult of all the known forms; moreover, a drama to succeed must have something to resolve. There must be a conflict, and that conflict must be real and fall within the comprehension of the audience, else it will fail. This at once limits us in the choice of our subject. In like manner, insistence upon the dominance of the element of sympathy restricts us still further, so that one is often discouraged in searching for a suitable theme. However, it is but just to add that while the playwright may be more limited in his choice of subject, he has certain advantages over the novelist which fully recompense him for the restrictions of the dramatic form. Moreover, if he is a master of his art, with its technique perfectly at command, he will produce effects far beyond the power of the greatest novelist. It is a knowledge of this fact

which encourages the student in drama, and makes comparison of the two plays mentioned of particular interest.

The terms, love, sympathy and pity are so often used synonymously that we seldom think of the nice shades of difference which distinguish them. However, this is unimportant, for pity engenders sympathy, and sympathy is a manifestation of love; perhaps it is love itself. In any case, if we are able to analyze these sensations at all, we know that sympathy awakens a lofty spiritual emotion which gives exquisite pleasure and satisfaction. This being admitted, it behooves the playwright to select such subjects and render them in such manner as to develop this emotion. From this it should not be inferred that the element of humor must be suppressed; on the contrary, the reversal from sympathy to humor is often desirable and sometimes absolutely necessary. In a lesser degree the same is true of the emotion of terror. In fact, a drama may contain all of these elements, but in its final effect the sympathetic note should dominate.

In comparing the plays of Pinero and Mirbeau we can, fortunately, eliminate the question of technique, for both plays are by masters of the art. The conflict in Mirbeau's play is tremendous, for it deals with one of the most vital questions of the day. The scene is laid amid surroundings which stimulate the imagination and please the eye. The country, the language and manners, although foreign to

some of us, nevertheless have a strong attraction. Moreover, the characters are true to life; and, most important of all, the plot develops from within the characters themselves. The construction of the play is strong; and, with the exception of the conclusion of the final scene, it is doubtful if its workmanship could be improved. That the play should hold the attention of the audience from first to last is not surprising, for in some of the scenes the action is intense. And yet, in spite of this, the impression it leaves upon one is ephemeral. Why is this? There can be but one answer. The characters do not inspire in the spectators that sympathy which touches the heart; on the contrary, the effect is rather to inspire discord. Thus there is engendered a feeling that the retribution which follows the evil enacted is perfectly right. In brief, the principal characters are more evil than good, and the fact that they all get their just deserts upon this earth instead of in a future world is a source of satisfaction. This may appear an extraordinary view to take of this remarkable play, but we believe it is just. True, there is one character, the daughter, Germain Lechat, who, torn by the daily spectacle of her father's harshness and dishonesty, confides to her lover, Lucien, her contempt of her father's acts, the object being to convince him that her father is unworthy of his fidelity, and induce him to fly with her from the home she has found intolerable. This is truly a great scene. But in spite

of all it is not convincing, for this daughter actually hates her father and regards her frivolous mother with contempt. This is horrible, and though we may justify Germain, we cannot forgive her hatred of her father nor her neglect of her mother—there is too much bitterness in it all. Love might have accomplished what hate did not; but that is another question. Suffice it, the character is true to life, and can be duplicated any day, which only goes to prove that art is superior to mere life. A photograph of life is not art. True art exalts the mind and inspires the noblest emotions, which is precisely what this character fails to do. We need not discuss the other characters, for the minor roles are unimportant, and the principal ones all fail to develop the necessary amount of sympathy. The author's great chance was with this character of Germain. He failed, and that in spite of some masterful scenes. True, the play may have an extended run, for the subject with which it deals is one of great interest, and its production is very, very timely, but unfortunately the attack is commonplace, and simply gives us a photograph of life, with only an indirect reason for so doing.

In "Letty" Pinero took a commonplace subject and by his masterly ability developed it into a noble play, adverse critics to the contrary notwithstanding. The objection that it deals with middle class English life, and that this, at best, cannot be interesting, is not to the point. The fact is that he has succeeded

where others have failed; and all this through his wonderful analysis and exposition of character. When he wrote this play he knew Letty's ambitions and aspirations. He knew the motives and compelling forces which were to drive her to the very brink of destruction, and he felt that the contest of her better nature with her ambitions would develop a responsive and sympathetic chord in the audience. He made no mistake, for the climax of the fourth act (the scene between Letty and Letchmere) is unquestionably one of remarkable power and originality, and could only have been conceived by a master. From the opening of this scene to its conclusion one sympathizes with Letty in her desire to be something more than a clerk in a Strand establishment. She has the accomplishments and refinements of a lady, and is capable of making a good and faithful wife, but unfortunately she is poor and in debt. To achieve her desires by marriage appears to be the only way open to her. Her vulgarian employer, Manderville, would gladly marry her, but she cannot endure him. Her aristocratic but disreputable friend Letchmere would also marry her, but cannot do so, being already married and undivorced. Thus we arrive at the opening of the scene above mentioned. Letty cannot withstand the allurements of the gay social life she wishes so eagerly to enter. She loves Letchmere, and in spite of his bad reputation believes him worthy of her; indeed, she has had many proofs of

his nobility of character. She had coldly weighed all in her mind and has determined to live with him "en camarade." They meet by appointment. The details of settlement are entered into and Letty is about to fall—when, lo! the unexpected happens; Letchmere receives word that his sister, Mrs. Crosbie, whom he has loved and cherished all his life, has eloped with a worthless fellow. In a burst of despair he tells Letty all, and it is in the narrative of his sister's perfidy that he mirrors the anguish she would cause herself. She foresees the future that awaits her and the contempt with which Letchmere will eventually regard her. This convinces her that the price she is about to pay for her vain desire is too great. At last her eyes are opened, and then there is awakened within her that better moral nature which thereafter dominates her whole life. It is this spiritual awakening which is the charm of this masterly play.

The epilogue or fifth act is particularly interesting, for it gives us direct evidence of Letty's conversion and teaches a great truth, albeit in a feeble, half-hearted way, viz.: that it is in the joy of work that we must seek the greatest aid to happiness.

We have avoided the question of the possibility of the existence in life of such a character as Letchmere, but the author, who knows English life better than most of us, no doubt has found him. It is in making him half evil and half noble that he

wins our sympathy, showing that he appreciated the value of this element as a dramatic force. The play is powerful, convincing and artistic, and the impression it leaves is most enduring. This is the best proof of its unfailing power.

That there are many and various ways of creating sympathy in drama is well known, but its full dramatic power is not sufficiently appreciated, else we should not have to witness plays of mere theatrical situation instead of dramatic scenes of character.

In brief, then, as sympathy is one of the vital forces in life it is also the vital one in drama, for drama portrays life, and sympathy is the well-spring of life itself. We should not marvel at its power, for it is but another manifestation of love, and love alone is capable of awakening the sweetest, loftiest and best emotions of the human heart.



THE DRAMATIC POWER OF TERROR.

IN our observations upon "The Play of the People" we submitted that the defects of modern melodrama do not arise so much from the selection of themes which, with few exceptions, are events of everyday life, as from the intellectual conception and æsthetic treatment of them. The ambitions of the working girl, her temptations and struggles for an existence are themes as old as melodrama itself, yet Pinero has by his masterly ability produced in his "Letty" a play of unfailing power, one which, in spite of its foreign atmosphere, will appeal to any audience which is capable of appreciating the anguish of an idealistic nature fighting to free itself from the deadly conventionality in which it has been placed by cruel fate.

That the authors of melodrama pay little attention to the psychological action of their characters is evidenced by the impossibilities they impose upon us. The authors submit that they select their characters from life, and that therefore they must be real, living entities; then to defeat their object they place their characters in the most absurd the-

atrical situations, simply for the purpose of thrilling the audience. The average formula for melodrama is approximately a scene or two of pathos, a love scene, a scene or two of comedy and a dozen or more scenes of blood curdling theatrical situation. An impossible combination for the production of either an artistic or dramatic result.

We have already shown that pity, sympathy and love are much akin, for pity engenders sympathy and sympathy is love, and love in its best sense exalts the highest emotions within us. In a like manner fear and terror are much the same, but they are the antithesis of the former, for they are the result of our moral or physical cowardice, and while we may be tremendously moved by these emotions, the effect is not exalting but depressing. It is well known that certain actions of the mind, such, for example, as the nourishing of hate or the appeal of fear, actually induce a physical depression which lowers the whole human vitality. This being the case, it is not surprising that sordid subjects should accomplish the same result, whether portrayed in drama or otherwise. Moreover, regarded from the æsthetic point of view, repellent subjects cannot be admitted in the realm of art, for the object of art is to elevate the mind and exalt the soul through the contemplation of the beautiful. We are therefore of the opinion that the English censor acted wisely in refusing his assent to the production of "the Cenci" of Shelley and Ibsen's "Ghosts,"

two plays which deal with such morbid and repulsive subjects as to exclude them as works of art. As our ideals are formed and changed very slowly, we cannot be expected to return to the ideals of two thousand years ago simply to please one author, or to form new ones suddenly to please another. We acquire our conceptions of the beautiful from personal experience and the environment of the age in which we live; moreover, while our ideals as a nation are certainly higher today than they have been at any period in our history, the conclusion is irresistible that they will be still higher a hundred years hence, advancing with the progress of our country and its people.

There can be no doubt that the emotions of terror and fear are disagreeable to us, sensitive natures being greatly depressed by them. Why then do our best dramatists employ these means to surprise and awe their audience? An answer to this question is difficult except by fully reviewing the object and history of tragedy itself, which would be beyond our present purpose. Suffice it, the appeal of terror may be mainly defended as a contrast to sympathy, and in this way its use is most artistic, for, as we hail the day after a sombre, gloomy night, so the mind may be led through gloom to the most exalted flights of joy and contentment. It is at such moments that we really live, at other times we simply endure or at best submit to mere illusion. Broadly stated, the idealist trinity is love,

truth and beauty, and all great works of art have these elements so deftly blended within them that the mind is exalted in their contemplation.

To more fully illustrate the dramatic power of terror we have selected the fourteenth century morality play of "Everyman," a remarkable play, which was a favorite subject of representation upon religious feasts and holidays during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As this religious tragedy was written with the direct purpose of inspiring fear, a study of it will be of particular interest.

The Church at that period was not above using drama to convey its teachings and admonitions, and there can be no doubt that the author fully understood the profound effect his theme would have upon the audience, whom he no doubt hoped to awaken to a realization of their wickedness and frivolity. The result fully justified his expectations and would seem to confirm Bacon's theory that the fear of punishment is a more powerful incentive to right conduct than the hope of reward. Be that as it may, "Everyman" is a play of unfailing power and well worthy of our consideration.

The theme of this historic drama is Death, or, more accurately, universal mortality. In this respect it deals with a hard and regrettable truth, one to which no intelligent explanation has ever been given which will harmonize it with the eternal desire to live, a desire which is one of the laws of nature itself. It is therefore not surprising that

this play should be profound in its philosophy and in its effect upon the audience.

The play of "Everyman" begins with a short prologue spoken by a messenger who calls upon the audience to give ear to their "Heaven King." Then God speaks and condemns the world for its wickedness, covetousness and sloth; God then summons Death, His mighty messenger, and sends him to Everyman, bidding him make a pilgrimage. Death finds Everyman in the heyday of youth, frivolous and gay, little dreaming that his career is so near an end. He offers Death gold to be permitted to live a little longer, but the only concession Death makes him is the privilege of appealing to his friends to accompany him upon his pilgrimage. He appeals first to Fellowship, then to Kindred and Goods, and finally to Good Deeds, who, alas, is too weak to do so, but she renders him a great service by sending him Knowledge, who leads him to Confession. After having been shriven, Good Deeds becomes strong again, and, accompanied by Strength, Discretion, Beauty and Five Wits, Everyman, with Knowledge and Good Deeds, sets out upon the journey to the tomb. When they arrive at the brink of the grave Strength, Discretion, Beauty and Five Wits take fright and abandon him. This greatly discourages Everyman, who now clings to Good Deeds as his only true friend. Supported and chastened by Good Deeds, Everyman commends his spirit unto the Lord and de-

scends into the grave with Good Deeds. As the tomb closes over them an angel is heard singing, welcoming his soul into Heaven.

From this brief synopsis, it will be seen that the plot of the play is of the utmost simplicity, and that each character is a symbol, the character of Goods being properly translated by the term Wealth today, the others being at once recognized under their respective names. This play is a remarkable example of the artistic use of symbolism, for here the character of Everyman symbolizes each and every one of us, and in viewing his sufferings we have mirrored before us our own fate. It is perhaps one of the most powerful tragedies in English literature, for the reason that it deals solely with Death, and shows us the fleeting nature of life, in doing which it strikes terror into those who have never reflected upon the serious purpose and nature of life, and therefore have failed to add their mite to the good of humanity. It would seem at first glance that this play, by its dominating note of terror, would be incapable of creating any sympathy whatever, but the reverse is the case, for Everyman is both a living character and a symbol; we therefore pity Everyman the character, and are terrified by Everyman the symbol. Nevertheless, the dominating effect is unquestionably that of gloom, if not of actual terror, and all the consolation of the Church which the author offers us does not suppress the eternal desire to live, which exists within

everyone who witnesses this play. Had the author, after having led us to the brink of the grave, carried his masterly play only one step farther, he would have conceived an apotheosis or deification of the soul, the contrast of which with the preceding gloom would have exalted the mind by the contemplation of one of the most beautiful conceptions of the Church. As it is, the play fails from the artistic point of view, just at the moment that its success should have been paramount. It is not our intention to discuss the theory of the deification of the soul, nor the means by which this conception could have been rendered in drama. The author of *Everyman* did not use this idea, simply because his main purpose was to inspire terror, and thereby reform the wicked who witnessed the play. However, we believe the additional scene suggested, while it would have detracted little from the power of the play, would unquestionably have improved it artistically, for the mind is capable of the most sublime flights of fancy and contentment at just such moments. Of course, the success of this effect demands the acceptance of certain religious ideals upon the part of the audience, which is equivalent to saying that religious plays are written for believers, not scoffers. The same argument is true of our social ideals, which we relinquish very slowly. If therefore the playwright's conceptions are at variance with the accepted ideals of his audience, he simply courts failure and abuse. This in part

explains the failure of the Elizabethan tragedies to hold us at the present day, especially those which deal with spooks, witches, apparitions and the like, for with intelligent people these effects have lost their power and are more apt to inspire ridicule than fear. If the ancient classical drama still holds us, it is because these tragedies portray the irresistible power of Destiny, which we recognize today as Fate or Chance, a power which is fully as potent now as it was in the days of the Greeks.

Briefly, then, the effect of terror is to produce a depressing emotion in the audience, one which is the direct antithesis of sympathy, from which it cannot be separated rationally nor artistically. It is a contrasting emotion to sympathy, and as such its appeal is most profound. The successful use of it therefore depends upon its proper balancing with the pleasurable or sympathetic emotions, of which love and pity are the most powerful and exalting.



HUMOR IN DRAMA.

HUMOR has been defined as the salt of life; it is a caprice of our natures, or rather that quality which gives to ideas a ludicrous or fantastic turn, the effect of it being to excite the pleasurable emotions which we exhibit in laughter or mirth. Its unfailing power to win an audience is well known, and it is to this emotion that the amateur's attention is first attracted. It may take the form of a play of wit, sarcasm, satire, irony or the like; in any case it is certain to meet with a prompt response from the average audience.

Comedy, which is the term under which we class the different forms of humor, is therefore an essential element in drama. It does not deal with heart-searching emotions nor terrifying incidents, but trades rather in eccentricity of character and quaintness of manner; consequently its chief dramatic use is to relieve the tension of a serious action. It is in this manner that it was used by the Elizabethan playwrights, who fully appreciated the tastes and weaknesses of their audience. However, comedy is not an absolute essential to the success of a play. Nearly all the best tragedies and certain of the most powerful dramas have not a ray of hu-


mor in them. The reason is not far to seek, for serious subjects, such as deal with the dignified and noble qualities of the human nature, admit only of a serious and earnest presentation.

It has been said that the direct appeal of drama is either to make the audience think, feel or laugh, and certainly a drama which does not accomplish at least one of these results is a failure, but to combine all these qualities in the proper proportions in a single play demands the greatest ability, and few playwrights can accomplish it. Nevertheless, good examples are not lacking, but they will be found to be by masters of the art. As an example we shall take Bronson Howard's "Henrietta," the most successful drama written within recent years. This play has in it the element of tragedy, for the death of young Van Alsten at the conclusion of the second act cannot be considered otherwise. The element of pathos and sympathy also exists in many scenes, and bubbling through the whole is the delightful element of humor, so deftly blended that it carries the audience irresistibly onward to the happy conclusion of the final act. Moreover, for those who desire to think, the play has many suggestions, but it cannot be called a purpose play or one designed to preach a sermon. It accomplishes by ridicule what would have been difficult to achieve in any other way. It is the form of art which hides its art; therein lies its subtlety and its beauty. As to the means by which the author has secured this

happy result we need not inquire, for that demands a study of character and technique which is beyond our present purpose. Suffice it, humor in the hands of an artist has an unfailing power to win an audience, and it is the best means which the playwright has at his command for relieving the stress of a serious action.



REFLECTIVE THOUGHT IN DRAMA.

HUS far our attention has been occupied mainly with the emotional, for the reason that drama is born of conflict, and the conflicts of life are the causes which create or awaken certain emotions; furthermore, we have shown under "Sympathy" and "Humor" that the effect of the pleasurable emotions upon our natures is exalting, and under the collective head of "Terror" that the effect of the unpleasant emotions is correspondingly depressing. We have now to consider that quality in drama which appeals to the intellect. The success of this appeal, unlike the emotional, depends upon the intelligence of the audience, and the clarity and logic with which the author develops his thought. It is therefore that quality which we should expect to appeal to people of mature years and cultivation, those who from their environment and experiences of life have had a broad and liberal education. Unfortunately this class is relatively a small one, for the stress of life in our present state of civilization is such that few people have time to read or reflect, except upon such subjects as touch their immediate lives and existence. It is doubtless for this reason that certain writers discourage alto-

gether the introduction of reflective thought in drama, claiming, and with much reason, that the essay or narrative form of writing is preferable for conveying ideas which make us reason and reflect. Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible to introduce thought in drama and at the same time sustain the action, for, with an intelligent audience, intellectual dialogue and in certain cases monologues also actually create action by stimulating the mind. As a proof of this we have but to take any of the good plays which abound in great and beautiful thoughts and attempt to read them with these passages eliminated. We will then discover that while we have in no way interfered with the progress of the plot we have greatly marred the beauty of the play, and in certain scenes have actually destroyed the action, for action is not merely movement, but the interest which the scene creates in the audience. One of the best modern examples of the poetic drama is Hauptmann's "Sunken Bell," a masterpiece of symbolism, poetry and thought. Another interesting example is Shakespeare's "As You Like It," a play which abounds in reflective thought. In this play the author introduces the melancholy Jacques, a philosophical character, with the direct purpose of adding a literary and thoughtful quality to the play. How well he succeeded is shown by the fact that the noble soliloquy of Jacques, "All the world's a stage," etc., can be quoted by anyone who has the slightest knowledge of Shakespeare or the drama.

If this character were eliminated, which could easily be done, or even if this soliloquy were omitted, the play would lose greatly in beauty, in interest and in action.

The reflective quality, both moral and poetic, will be found to run through all good classic plays, it being often so deftly woven into their fabric that it would be impossible to separate it without destroying the play. Notwithstanding this we find critics sagely informing us that the drama is not expected to make us think, but simply to entertain. These critics fail to recognize that great and good thoughts beautifully expressed are in themselves a source of action, and as such cannot be neglected. In fact thought and beauty of expression are the two great qualities a literary work must possess if it is to live.

We need not concern ourselves with the manner in which reflective thought may properly be introduced in drama; that falls under the technique of the art. We believe it is chiefly in the choice of theme and the development of character that we must seek the solution of this problem; furthermore, a strong intellectual grasp of the subject is absolutely necessary, or the result will be unsatisfactory. Such themes, for example, as "Love and Duty," "Regeneration through Love," "Ambition and Duty," "Love and Pride," "Fate and Love," and the like will inspire in the author of ability a strong intellectual treatment, which, with fair tech-

nical skill, will lift the subject from the commonplace to the dignified and noble.

On the other hand, if the subject is commonplace the author will be handicapped from the outset, and it will require a marvelous amount of ability to produce a worthy result. We have already noted this in discussing Pinero's "Letty," a theme which has served for melodrama from time immemorial.

"Leah Kleschner," a recent drama by C. M. S. McClelland, is another excellent example of an old melodramatic theme beautified by the consummate ability of the author. This play deserves our attention from the fact that it appeals as much to the intelligence as to the emotions, and delivers its message not by direction but rather by suggestion. This is a good drama of the modern school, and its success is most encouraging to those who have despaired of our native talent. The scene of the play is not laid in New York, but in Paris, and its whole atmosphere is distinctly French, which proves that the author is a careful student or else has acquired from long acquaintance the customs, manners and qualities of the people he portrays.

The story deals with the redemption of Leah Kleschner, a young woman who is the daughter and confederate of a notorious criminal, M. Garnier. She can barely remember her childhood, when she worked in the lettuce fields of Austria amid poor but innocent surroundings. She has grown to be a

woman, but the persistent memory of her happy childhood recalls her from a life of crime and awakens the better moral nature within her. This is not the old theme of "Redemption through love," but is clearly an awakening of the spiritual nature of the young woman brought about by a recognition of the detestable life she is living. The fact that love enters into the plot is purely secondary, and, we may add, somewhat improbable; for it is difficult to imagine that Paul Sylvane, minister of police, ex-deputy, etc., a man of culture and good family, would be willing to affront the conventionalities of society by marrying a criminal, even though he were absolutely certain of her redemption. However, Paul Sylvane is no ordinary man, but a strong, noble type of manhood, with firm belief in himself and in humanity. His experience as minister of police has convinced him that sin is only misdirected energy, and that a man or woman capable of crime is also capable of the greatest love and self-sacrifice.

It is the masterly presentation of this part of the proposition that gives this play its strong intellectual quality and lifts it from the level of melodrama to that of noble and artistic drama. The plot is distinctly melodramatic, but it is not necessary to go into its details nor to describe the other characters. We simply desire to note the manner in which the reflective thought is introduced, and we find that it is accomplished simply by the masterly development of theme and character. This

result was achieved not only by a superb command of technique, but by the earnest conviction of the author that the criminal classes whom we despise are capable of greater good than we generally believe. A theory which is based upon fact, for it is only amid trial, temptation and suffering that the noblest part of man's nature asserts itself.

Reflective thought is therefore that quality which appeals to the intellect. If the thought is lofty and noble it will add strength to the work. The theme itself should offer us the opportunity of introducing it, then if it is developed with good taste and technical skill it will add that valuable literary quality which will lift the drama from the commonplace to the noble and dignified.



SCENERY AND MUSIC IN DRAMA AS AN AID TO THE CREATION OF ATMOSPHERE.



THE drama being a composite art, combining painting, music, poetry and expression, it is undoubtedly greater than any of these arts separately, for it appeals to the eye, the ear, the heart and the intellect. We have already shown how powerful its appeal can be when directed to the heart and the intellect. We now desire to note its power to entrance and hold us simply by the means of scenery and music. To fully appreciate the force of this appeal, we should eliminate dialogue, speech, song and action or movement, and ascertain if we cannot create that marvelous quality called atmosphere without them. This result has actually been achieved by Mr. Belasco in the scenic introduction to "Madame Butterfly," a most artistic conception, consisting of five panoramic scenes of rare beauty by which the audience is led in imagination from San Francisco to the port of Yokohama, and thence to the tea house where Madame Butterfly first meets her husband, the young naval officer. The scene then changes to the home of Madame Butterfly, and the play begins. It has taken precisely ten

minutes of scenery and incidental music to accomplish this wonderful journey. In the meantime we have not seen a living creature of any kind nor heard a sound other than the monotonous Oriental music which accompanies the scenes; nevertheless so perfect is the illusion and so unfailing is its charm that when the dialogue and action begin we believe that we are in Japan and silent witnesses of the tragedy which takes place. We see therefore that an atmospheric quality can be produced in drama solely by music and scenery. We shall now introduce the third element of action or movement. This will give us that form of drama called pantomime or spectacle, in which the plot is acted without speech, the movement being accelerated by the ballet and music. In this form of drama there can be no hope of any great appeal to either the heart or the intellect. It is simply an artistic and pleasing illusion which for the time being entrances us, and appeals to our sense of the æsthetic or beautiful. Nevertheless it can be understood by anyone, and is capable of conveying an idea by means of living pictures. In the hands of a great artist marvelous effects have been attained by this form of drama, as has been proved by the production of "Excelsior" at the Eden Theatre, in Paris, in 1883. In this particular case a theatre was constructed for the purpose, with every modern appliance then known to the artist and engineer. The most elaborate scenery and costumes were designed, the music being espe-

cially composed for the occasion. Moreover, the idea which this gorgeous spectacle conveyed was well worthy of the effort, for it portrayed superstition, ignorance, greed and the powers of evil in conflict with hope, love, liberty, progress and the powers of good; the final scene concluding with a dream fantasie which exalted the power and majesty of France in the mind of every observer. It is pleasing to record that the financial success of this spectacle was quite equal to its worthy setting, which would suggest that scenery, music, pantomime and dance are not necessarily feeble means of conveying an idea and entertaining an audience. However, there is little doubt that the dramatic value of scenery and costume is greatly overestimated at present by our managers, who believe that they can make a worthless work succeed by the lavish expenditure of money.

We have seen that the atmospheric quality in drama can be obtained solely by the use of scenery and music, and that the addition of action, as in the pantomime or dance, carries the illusion still farther. We have now to consider the further addition of speech or dialogue. This develops a third form of drama, or melodrama, which, however, must not be confused with the blood curdling play at present known by that title. Henry Purcell, an Englishman, born in 1658, we believe, was the first to develop this beautiful form of drama. The manuscript of his "Fairy Queen," recently discovered

and performed in London, has proved its beauty. It is simply a well constructed play in which certain musical numbers have been introduced where the dramatic situations would warrant them, the action and development of the plot being carried on by the dialogue. It is therefore neither opera, musical comedy nor lyric drama, but a type quite distinct, the nearest approach to which we have recently witnessed in that beautiful drama of "Tom Moore." True, there were but four musical numbers in this play of five acts, but these were so deftly introduced that there was no cessation of the action, but an actual acceleration of it and the perfection of illusion. From this we conclude that the atmospheric quality is dependent upon absolute illusion, and illusion cannot be created where the means employed are too far disassociated from reality. For example, a musical prelude may precede a pastoral scene and introduce the tinkling bells of the flock, the shepherd's pipe, the distant chimes, etc. This may even continue after the curtain is raised and during the progress of the action upon the stage, such, for example, as the passing of the shepherd or some peasants, etc., but the instant the dialogue commences the music must cease, or else be so reduced in volume as not to detract from the power of the speaking voice, for clarity is the first requisite of drama, and if we cannot hear what the actors are saying the thought conveyed will not reach us; we must then depend entirely upon the pantomime of

the actors and the scenery to convey it, and the illusion is consequently less perfect.

We thus see that true melodrama offers great possibilities to the playwright, the scenic artist and the musician, and, while it may not be possible for any one mind to conceive and execute all that pertains to a single production, it is evident that proper collaboration should achieve this success. This has been done by Sir Henry Irving and others, who have associated with themselves not only the most competent actors, but also celebrated poets, painters and musicians, with most gratifying results. The poet, the painter, the musician and the actor, all must have the artistic instinct, the appreciation of the beautiful, if you will, and work toward one given end.

We have tried as far as possible to avoid the question of technique, for the reason that the average observer neither knows nor cares anything about it. The result is the only thing that interests him. Does the work appeal to his sympathy? Does it make him laugh? Does it terrify him? Does it make him think? And in its final effect, does it appeal to his sense of the beautiful? These are the questions we must answer. It is immaterial whether the artist paints his flat with a brush or a trowel, whether the poet writes in verse or in prose, whether the music is played upon an organ or by an orchestra. The great question is, does it accomplish its purpose?

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A play must portray good morals and high ideals; it must be developed with the æsthetic always in view; it must be executed with good technique, and back of and dominating it all must be the artist with his message, for art without a message is but a hollow sham. In conclusion, we cannot do better than quote from "The Technique of the Drama," by W. T. Price, one of the best works ever published upon this subject, his simple statement of a great truth:

"Let a man's genius be backed by art, and he is the one who has the mastery over the human heart above all poets, for what he feels, lives, sees and dreams comes to us visibly, and our eyes flash at the spoken sentiment, our hearts beat at the noble deed, our eyes moisten at the poetic thought. We see it all done in and for itself, not the author behind it, but Nature, God if you will."



Rennie

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on the drama.

NAME OF BORROWER

